Paul Cleereman

 2019 Laona High School Commencement Speech

 **“PRODUCTIVE CITIZENS IN TODAY’S, AND TOMORROW’S, SOCIETY”**

Good afternoon, …..this is more than a good afternoon, it is a GREAT afternoon. Many of you here today have known me for quite some time, and for the many of whom I have not had the pleasure of meeting, my name is Paul Cleereman. I am flattered that I was invited to be your commencement speaker for the Laona High School class of 2019. On behalf of our High School and our community, I want to extend a warm welcome to all the families and guests, who have joined us here this afternoon as we celebrate the accomplishments of these young men and women.

Graduation ceremonys are very exciting, fun, and so often run just a bit too ***long***. What I have planned to share this afternoon won’t take ***long***, but my hope is that my message serves all of you for a ***long*** time to come.

First and foremost, it is my honor to acknowledge two dedicated individuals who not only share the stage up here, but also share the 2019 graduate’s aspirations and goals for their future. Two individuals who truly want these young people to experience a life of accomplishment, happiness, and personal fulfillment. These two gentlemen’s integrity and work ethic are remarkable. Their dedication to every student, faculty member, and employee in our system sets a new standard. In their respective years here, each has been instrumental in the improved level of curriculum, student retention, increasing graduation rates, and a renewed sense of pride in our schools. They have instilled loyalty and taken a true pledge to improve our community through quality education. From all of us here today, we want to thank Superintendent, Mr. Larry Palubiki, and Principal, Mr. Jim Bradley, **(*turn and******initiate the applause).***

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Following the high bar set by Mr. Bradley and Mr. Palubiki is every single individual who comes and goes through the doors of Laona High School every day. To our dedicated teachers, our administrators, our facilities workers, our drivers, our kitchen staff, we thank you one and all,…***(applause).***

And last but certainly not least, so much of what we do, would not be possible without the groundswell of volunteerism we receive from parents, local citizens, and our boosters, who work tirelessly to make every activity, every function, and every sporting event, safe and successful. **(applause).**

As we celebrate the commencement of this class, we also recognize with distinction the members who have attained the highest level of honors. These kids, through dedicated study and preparation, have risen to the top levels of academic achievement. These types of accomplishments will follow them through their lives and become a building block of their reputations. They, their families, and all of us, are proud of what they have achieved. Please join me in congratulating the 2019 Laona Class Valedictorian, Trevor Cleereman, **(initiate applause**), along with our other merit students, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. **(continue applause).** (Paul, add any kids right above here that you want to mention academically and what they achieved)

Thirty-five years ago, this week, I sat where you are now. I too am a graduate of Laona High School, and very proud of my school and my community. I can’t tell you whether I paid attention thirty-five years ago, or whether I didn’t. I can tell you that I wish I had known then what I know now,….don’t we all! I hope someday, one or more of you are up here speaking to a future graduating class. And if so I am confident your message will be one of encouragement, positive suggestions, and lessons learned.

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Now I want to tell you about ***two*** more people here today, and those two people are **each** of you who are graduating.***You***, the young man or woman who is sitting here among us, and the ***you*** who will leave this ceremony shortly. Two people, the one today, and the one tomorrow.

You arrived at this point in your young life from not only your efforts, but the strong support and continual encouragement of those who took the time, interest, and care, to guide you, teach you, and point you in the right direction. Parents, grandparents, siblings, family friends, neighbors, people of faith, administrators, and your teachers. From this day on, many will quietly step away, *as well as others who will happily put on their party hats and* *jump for joy!* **(short laughter).** So as you look around and realize that the scaffolding and the training wheels are gone, it is now your responsibility of who you become tomorrow.

Whether you realize it or not, at this point in your life the building blocks of being a productive citizen are installed and downloaded, let me give you my version of **two** of them right now.

***First*** is your desire and willingness to **Learn**. You can and will gain momentum into this fast-paced world through either college, the trades, the armed services, or by direct apprenticeship with an employer. You’re on a roll now, this is the time to absorb the practical and educational knowledge, as well as the people skills, to attain the level of competence that will assure your ability to provide for yourself and your loved ones. Some of you may want to teach, fly, be a health care provider, an accountant, attorney, law enforcement, firefighter, and on and on. Others may want to dig their hands in the dirt, the grease, or even the bark as our family has done. Whether it’s the halls of our universities, or the garages and shops of trade schools, there is no better feeling than having the confidence to start and complete a job, and knowing it was done right.

And there are so many places, and opportunities, to learn what you really, really, want to do in life. Did you know there is a two-year associates degree available at a small college in Pennsylvania for masonry fireplace construction? Or were you aware that there is a four-year university in western Montana where you can earn a bachelor’s degree in equestrian care,

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which includes becoming a certified horseshoe Ferrier. And right here in Wisconsin, our back yard, there are twenty-three colleges, universities, and trade schools, within 97 miles of Laona, that offer degrees and certifications in literally hundreds of professions, trades, crafts, and skills.

I cannot emphasize to you more, find something you love to do, and get paid to do it. That’s the ultimate career. Some may think: “I don’t know what I want to do”. And that is perfectly normal. So, for those, pick something you have enjoyed as an adolescent and teenager then go get some type of schooling, training, or an apprenticeship. Landscaping, snow-plowing, drawing, painting, computers, welding, something that keeps you moving forward. It may or may not be your ultimate profession, but either way it will improve your confidence and stimulate your mind. And always know you can certainly change gears and go in a completely different direction down the road. It is perfectly acceptable for any of us to have three, four, or more careers throughout a lifetime of work. Many people find their ultimate satisfaction in a career they would have never initially thought about for themselves. And many arrive at that destination by getting out there now, learning, trying, and experiencing.

***Secondly*** is your **Reputation**, reputation is the gold standard, the core of who you are and who you will become. You’re in control of every action you take, every decision you make, all of which builds your reputation every hour of every day. SO,…be on time, return phone calls, honor commitments, keep promises regardless how far back you made them. Do what you say you will do, and if you’re not sure you can,…..then don’t say it to begin with. Furthermore for your reputation, never pre-judge people or situations. Respect everyone until proven otherwise. Make eye contact, be known for a solid handshake, and make that handshake your word, your bond, your commitment. Treat your family, your spouse, your children, and your friends with kindness and care. Treat strangers and newcomers with that same tone and courtesy. Check on your neighbors, check on the elderly, the challenged, the sick. Ten minutes of your time with someone who is alone or in need, can put a smile on their face for days. Be **loyal** where it is earned and be **honest** to a fault.

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Then there is family, family is the **hub** of the wheel, family is **center** of each of our universes. Family is to be cherished, helped, supported, and when need be, **rallied** together to face challenges. **(pause)**

Speaking of families, and we certainly are today, I am blessed with a large and caring family, and equally fortunate to be a part of several successful family businesses. None of it would have been possible without the dedication, hard work, and love, from my mother and father, Fran and Nancy Cleereman. To this day they remain the guiding lights to four generations of Cleeremans,…..**Thank you both, Mom and Dad**.

I want to take just a moment and bring up some challenges you might encounter, not only from outside, but from within yourself. Habits, traits, and routines, that we all should avoid. Be very aware of the current wave of entitlement thinking that can so easily sweep over any of us. We must remember we are not entitled to anything we have not earned or proven we are willing to learn. We’re not entitled to praise and awards for only doing the basics of what is expected of us. We’re not entitled to esteem trophies, as that is a false path to adulthood and reality. We are not entitled to blame others for our choices. And we are not entitled, whether professionally or in our personal lives, to be mean spirited, insulting, or even threatening. What we are entitled to though is to question or challenge anything we perceive as immoral, illegal, or inappropriate. And when we do challenge, be prepared to offer suggested remedies instead of just complaining. That shows you are sincerely interested in a path to resolution, and not just an argument. And as you become involved in debates, disagreements, and different viewpoints, remember your tone and demeanor will have a significant impact on the outcome.

Furthermore, don’t burn bridges. Do not think for one moment you’ll get a second chance just because Facebook or Twitter says you will. If you think or feel something you are doing isn’t right, it probably isn’t. Ask yourself: Did I act properly; did I say the right thing? If the answer inside you is NO, then correct the error so it doesn’t happen again. Never forget, it takes years to build a good **reputation**, but only minutes to ruin it.

 6.

One additional unrelated thought and idea for you to keep on a front burner. It is a very big and diverse planet we live on. Do not think the world ends down the block, or at the edge of town, or even at our country’s border. Work hard, save your money, make the time, (yes **make** the time because it won’t make itself), ……then go, see, travel from one horizon to the next. That new car can wait, that new porch can wait. Sitting with a bright-eyed child in a Himalayan village won’t wait. Working in a real Wyoming cattle drive won’t wait. Having a dolphin nudge you in warm south pacific waters won’t wait. Building a Habitat for Humanity won’t wait. Listening to a concert in Barcelona won’t wait. SO,…GO, look, listen, and truly enrich your life through experiencing what makes us all very different in this world, yet at the very same time, so similar. That new car won’t last a lifetime, but those experiences will.

As we conclude this afternoon, take some additional thoughts with you. Be known for your character and your compassion. Be the strong link in the chain, be the house on the block or the farm along the two-lane gravel road, where people know they can go for help. Be known for your inner strength, your patience, your tolerance, and your acceptance of others.

And never forget to work very hard at making good choices. For each action you take, there is a reaction, and the results of what you do and say, spread like ripples through a calm lake. ***Today, right here and now, set your moral compass on a course to becoming a productive member of society, for the rest of your life.* (Pause),**

**Have fun everyone, and be careful out there**,

 **Thank You.**